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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BRIDGETOWN 000087

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PASS TO USAID/GH/RCS/KELLY WOLFE AND USAID/LAC/PEG MARSHALL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [SC](#) [XL](#)

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR ST. KITTS AND NEVIS AI
INFORMATION

REF: STATE 209622

1. The following is in response to questions posed by reftel.

Preparedness/Communication

2. Does the government have a preparedness plan/strategy for preventing avian flu from becoming a pandemic and containing a pandemic once it occurs?

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis (GOSKN) has finalized a plan for dealing with Avian Influenza (AI), called the St. Kitts and Nevis Avian Influenza National Strategic Plan.

3. If the country has a strategy, how capable is it of implementing it?

Although the GOSKN has only a modest customs, immigration, and public health capacity, its Avian Influenza National Strategic Plan is embedded in a regional approach, spearheaded by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC). This regional approach increases the country's capacity for implementation.

4. Please provide a copy of the plan or the Internet address for the plan.

Post will immediately forward an electronic copy of the St. Kitts and Nevis Avian Influenza National Strategic Plan to the OES Senior Health Advisor.

5. How truthful will the government be in reporting the scope of any disease outbreak among people? Among animals? What incentives could be offered that would likely result in more transparency?

The GOSKN has begun its preparations against a possible AI pandemic in a transparent manner, stressing open, regional cooperation. The Government is likely to continue such preparations, as well as react to the spread of a pandemic, transparently and in coordination with regional partners.

The Chief Medical Officer and Chief Veterinary Officer plan to continue raising awareness and stressing open communication at the national executive, public, and agency levels. The Cabinet was briefed in October and further briefings will occur as new information appears.

6. Where does preparing for an avian flu human pandemic rank among government priorities? Who and what would most influence the country to give the issue a higher priority? Who is the key "go-to" person, office or department (e.g., Minister for Health, Prime Minister, etc.)? For USG officials to engage on this issue?

Combating the threat of avian flu pandemic is a high priority for the GOSKN. The contact persons for the GOSKN are Mr. Elvis Newton, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health, and Dr. Patrick Martin, Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health. Both can be reached by phone at: 869-465-2551 (Government HQ ask for Ministry of Health) or by fax at: 869-466-8574 or 869-465-1316. Dr. Martin can also be reached at the following e-mail address: skncmo@yahoo.com.

¶7. Have national laws been reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with international health regulations (IHRS) and do not pose barriers to avian influenza detection, reporting, containment, or response?

The GOSKN has reviewed its public health laws and has determined that they are consistent with international health regulations (IHRS) and do not pose barriers to avian influenza detection, reporting, containment, or response.

¶8. Is the host country already working with international organizations or other countries on the avian flu issue? Are government leaders likely to ask for assistance from the U.S. or other countries? Would government leaders be receptive to messages from U.S. leaders through a bilateral approach, at a multilateral forum such as the UN (WHO, FAO, etc.)? Or APEC, or through bilateral contacts by a third country? What would the country want from the U.S. in return for its efforts?

As noted in paragraph three, the GOSKN is already working with international organizations, NGOs, and other countries. The GOSKN would be pleased to continue working on a regional and international level with other governments.

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¶9. Does the country currently administer annual flu shots? If not, might it consider doing so? What is the production capability (i.e., how many doses of the annual trivalent flu vaccine can the country make) for human influenza vaccines in the country? Does the country produce influenza vaccine for poultry and if so how much? If the country is developing an H5N1 vaccine, where is it in production and testing? Any licensing issues? Is there a liability shield for foreign makers/donors of vaccines? If not, any prospects of one being enacted?

GOSKN does not administer annual flu shots. The likelihood of the Government administering annual flu shots is contingent upon regional decision-making through PAHO's Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). The GOSKN has no production capacity for vaccines and none is likely for the foreseeable future.

¶10. How well informed is the population about the avian flu threat and about measures they should take to mitigate the threat? What mechanisms are available for providing additional information to the population, particularly in rural areas and how effective are these measures?

The public is continually informed about the threat of avian influenza via electronic and print media. Also, the Health Promotion/Education Unit and Communications Unit of the Agriculture Department will continue their media education activities, while preparing an information campaign utilizing banners, flyers, television, and Internet.

Surveillance/Detection

¶11. How capable are the medical and agriculture sectors of detecting a new strain of influenza among people or animals respectively? How long might it take for cases to be properly diagnosed, given other endemic diseases? Can influenza viruses be subtyped in the country, if so by whom,

and if not where are they sent? Does the country send samples to a WHO/EU/U.S. reference laboratory?

There is no local lab capacity for strain identification; provisions have been made for specimen transfer to CAREC in Trinidad. Post has been unable thus far to ascertain how long it would typically take to diagnose an animal or human avian flu case in St. Kitts, but will report that information septel.

¶12. What are the critical gaps that need to be filled to enhance the country's disease detection and outbreak response capabilities? What is the country's greatest need in this area from the U.S. or international organizations?

The most critical gap is public health care staffing. Some important positions in the country's public health system are occupied by a sole person. Should such a worker take sick or leave, respective public health activities would suffer until the worker is replaced. PAHO and CAREC are aware of this issue, however, and are planning to establish a regional rapid-response personnel team to complement vulnerable national health systems.

Response/Containment

¶13. Does the country have a stockpile of medications, particularly of antivirals, and if so how much? If some has been ordered, how much and when is it expected?

GOSKN does not have a stockpile of medications or vaccines. Medication and vaccine availability during a pandemic is the critical issue given that St. Kitts and Nevis is not a producing country.

¶14. Does the country have a stockpile of pre-positioned personal protective gear?

St. Kitts and Nevis has an inadequate amount of personal protective gear, but inventory augmentation is ongoing.

¶15. What is the rapid response capacity for animal and human outbreaks? Are guidelines in place for the culling and vaccination of birds, disinfection of facilities, and limitations on animal movement?

The Animal Health Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for surveillance and response activities.

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Guidelines exist and updates are facilitated by PAHO. Human outbreaks will be managed using social-distancing measures in the community and quarantine within hospitals or other designated facilities.

¶16. How willing and capable is the government of imposing quarantines and social distancing measures (closing schools, public gatherings, mass transit)? Would its military enforce quarantines?

The GOSKN plans to implement all required public health measures, including quarantines, as a matter of law and with full enforcement, using all available means.
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